

*orig. Oklahoma
State Univ.
CIA 4.01 Covert
Action*

No Right to Interfere

Guest Editorial

Isn't it time to seriously question the wisdom of the long standing U.S. commitment to covert action against foreign governments or citizens whose policies are deemed inimical to U.S. interests? As a staunch defender of self-determination and national rights, the United States has no right to interfere in the affairs of other nations, even if we disagree with their policies and their alliances. I am not referring to intelligence gathering, the spy function of the CIA, part of which is done undercover. I mean the planning, support and implementation of covert actions intended to overthrow a foreign government, interfere with a foreign government's elective processes, or compromise a foreign leader.

A strong case can be made that such activities are unacceptable behavior for a nation of our heritage and aspirations and are not beneficial to our legitimate interests. First, the CIA's covert activities are not only immoral, but illegal, if judged by U.S. or international law. In a letter to CIA Director William Casey, Senator Barry Goldwater, a solid conservative and chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, called the mining of the Nicaraguan harbors "... an act violating international law. It is an act of war." No legal right exists for the United States to act or support actions to overthrow governments with whom we are not at war, destroy their infrastructure and facilities, or murder their officials or citizens, even those who are outspoken critics of our nation, our allies and our friends.

Second, covert actions have not proven effective. The 1961 ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, planned by the Eisenhower and implemented by the Kennedy administration, was counterproductive. U.S. relations with Cuba were damaged beyond repair. Castro's stature in the Caribbean and Latin America was enhanced, and increased support to Cuba from the Soviet Union was encouraged. Third, the very nature of CIA covert operations is a subtle, continuing threat to the well-being of the United States. Such secrecy on the part of the CIA, the Congress, and the administration is hardly compatible with the basic concepts of our constitution and the traditional openness of our government. What certainty is there that unscrupulous persons cloaked in secrecy may not, in a time of crisis, turn inward and use covert actions to thwart the will of the majority?

Finally, there is a question of credibility. Immoral and illegal covert operations harm the image of the United States as a leader in the world community's quest for international peace and security. We need not resort to activities that are illegal, immoral, hazardous, and of questionable effectiveness. We should not stoop to undercover violence and terrorism for which we harshly criticize other nations. Surely there are better ways to use our power and resources to cope with the problems facing a troubled, interdependent world and thereby enhance our own security.

C. Maxwell Stanley
Pres., Stanley Foundation